

Clarifying the differences in learning EFL reading strategies: An analysis of portfolios

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal the differences in the process of learning reading strategies by EFL learners whose English proficiency levels differ. For this purpose, portfolios made by 10 Japanese female college students learning English (five in the higher proficiency group and the other five in the lower) were analyzed. The results found six prominent differences between the two groups. The first difference is the amount of description recorded in each portfolio. The second, third, and fourth differences concern the understanding of the purpose and the merit of each strategy use, of the conditions in which each strategy is used effectively, and of the combined use of strategies. Also, the timing for and the method for evaluating efficacy of strategy use are different between the two groups. After the full descriptions of these six differences with samples from portfolios, some pedagogical and research implications for strategy instruction are made.

Keywords: Reading strategies; Portfolios; Learners' English proficiency level

1. Introduction

Since the use of strategies has been considered to be one of the important factors for successful language learning, strategy instruction by various methods has been implemented in many countries (e.g., Ayaduray and Jacobos, 1997; Dreyer and Nel, 2003; Oxford et al., 1990). At the same time, the efficacy of such strategy instruction has been ascertained, to the best of the authors' knowledge, in terms of one or more of three criteria: learners' language proficiency, the frequency of their strategy use, or their reactions to the strategy instruction. As for the first criterion, Kern (1989), for example, trained for one semester 53 American university students learning French to use cognitive strategies for reading comprehension. His results showed that the instruction had some positive effects on the improvement of the learners' (especially, the lower proficiency learners') reading comprehension ability. In Takeuchi and Wakamoto (2001), strategies for writing, speaking, reading, and vocabulary building were taught to 21 Japanese university students learning EFL. They found that the frequency of their participants' strategy use increased and the higher frequency was retained for at least two and a half months after the instruction. Ayaduray and Jacobos (1997) also confirmed the efficacy of strategy instruction in terms of the frequency of strategy use by teaching 32 high school students learning English as a second language to use cognitive strategies for speaking and listening. Dadour and Robbins (1996), among others, investigated the efficacy of the strategy instruction according to learners' reaction. In their study, a total of 46 Japanese college students learning EFL were trained to use cognitive strategies for speaking and listening; the researchers found that they reacted positively to the instruction. Cohen et al. (1996) evaluated the efficacy of strategy instruction based on two criteria out of three mentioned above. They taught strategies for speaking to 55 American students learning a foreign language (i.e., French or Norwegian). Their results indicated that the strategy instruction had positive effects on the learners' speaking ability and on the frequency of their strategy use. Other studies that investigated the efficacy of strategy instruction based on two criteria found similar results in their respective contexts (Barnett, 1988; Dreyer and Nel, 2003).

While strategy instruction has been confirmed to be effective in various degrees in the studies discussed above, learners' language proficiency level is also reported to influence the efficacy of

strategy instruction (Ikeda and Takeuchi, 2003). The present study attempts to clarify the possible differences in the learning process of reading strategies during the strategy instruction between EFL learners at a higher proficiency level and those at a lower level. For this purpose, the following research question is posed: What differences are to be found in the process of learning EFL reading strategies between higher and lower proficiency learners of EFL during strategy instruction?

2. Procedure

2.1. Participants

Participants were 37 female non-English majors at a Japanese university. They were in their second year and learning EFL as one of their required courses. No one had experience in learning English overseas. The participants therefore had approximately seven years of English learning experience. Five students among them were selected respectively for the higher and the lower proficiency groups based on the results of a 45-item cloze test and in-class review quizzes.¹ Every seventh word was deleted in the cloze test, and the answers were scored using the exact word method. A cloze test is a language testing technique with high reliability (e.g., Oller, 1979). Although some criticisms have been made especially in terms of content validity, its construct validity can be justified through its tapping into language redundancy (Davies et al., 1999). The cloze test used in this study also shows a high correlation of .78 ($p < .01$) with the reading section of the FCE, an intermediate-level Cambridge ESOL Exam, which is taken by more than 270,000 people each year in more than 100 countries (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2006).

The differences between the two groups in both the tests (i.e., cloze test and in-class review quiz) were confirmed to be significant in the non-parametric *Mann–Whitney U* tests (see Table 1). Their teacher also gave her subjective judgment of a clear difference between the two groups based on her teaching experience of a similar population.

2.2. Strategy instruction and data collection

During the period of eight weeks, the participants received a 20-minute session of explicit strategy instruction in every class, which met once a week for 90 minutes. Seven strategies were selected by their instructor based on (a) the common denominator strategies (Ikeda, 2005) found in textbooks designed for Japanese EFL college students and (b) the instructor's teaching experiences with a similar population. These seven strategies were taught in the order presented in Table 2. Week 8, the last week, was used for reviewing the seven strategies taught from Weeks 1 to 7. A pre-training questionnaire confirmed that the students in both the higher and the lower proficiency groups had not used these seven strategies frequently at the beginning of the instruction.

For the remaining period of class time, i.e., approximately 60 minutes, participants read one passage in a textbook and checked their comprehension by answering questions prepared by their teacher. The passages used ranged from expository texts, diaries, to novels.

In the strategy instruction, participants were taught one reading strategy per class by using a handout prepared by the first author. The handout included the purpose and the merit of using the strategy to be taught, explanation and an example of its use, and an exercise for its application to other reading activities (see Appendix A). From Week 2, at the beginning of each training session, the students also reviewed the strategy taught in the previous class.

In addition to the instruction in each class, as out-of-class assignments, the participants were required to make portfolio entries on strategy learning every week (see Appendices B and C for the samples of the entries). In making an entry to be included in each portfolio, the participants were first requested to find, on their own, an English passage that appeared suitable for using the strategy taught in the preceding class, and to attach it to the left side of the sheet. In reading the passage, they then were required to use the strategy taught, and to record retrospective accounts of how they had used the

strategy and what opinions they had on using it. After the first week, the students were also encouraged to use the strategies taught in the preceding weeks and to report on their use in their weekly portfolio entry.

Portfolios have been utilized in many educational contexts, but their definitions and ways of implementation seem to vary depending on their purposes: (a) for assessment or instructional purposes (e.g., Danielson and Abrutyn, 1997), (b) for teacher education (e.g., Antonek et al., 1997), and (c) for learner training (e.g., Donato and McCormick, 1994; Smolen et al., 1995). Danielson and Abrutyn (1997), based on their review of various definitions of portfolios, argue that most definitions share the following three characteristics: (a) they are purposeful; (b) they are collections of learner's work; and (c) they include learner's reflections on each work. The portfolio in this article, which also shares these three characteristics, is defined as "an instructional tool that purposefully documents a series of learner's work with her reflections on that work." It should be noted, though, that the learner's work in this article is not only the materials attached on the left side of each portfolio entry, but also the descriptions made on the right side of the entry concerning how the learner had utilized the strategies taught in the instruction, while reading the materials recorded by her on the left side. Reflections in this article thus concern the use of strategies and their efficacy. For these reasons, the entries used in this study differ from "reading response logs" (Smolen et al., 1995), which contain only reflective accounts with no learner's concrete work attached. They also differ from "protocols," which often mean the collection/s of "spoken" discourse obtained through a data elicitation technique such as "thinking-aloud" (Tateoka, 2003).

To obtain accurate information on strategy use while not overburdening the participants with L2 processing, their L1 (i.e., Japanese) was used in making entries for portfolios. Excerpts shown in this article are therefore English translations by the authors. An entry made in this way (not the entire portfolio of each learner) was required to be submitted every week to provide ample opportunities for feedback. The entries submitted were looked through by their teacher, and several good ones were chosen and then introduced to all the students in the next class as feedback (Janzen, 1996).² In this way, the experiences of more efficient strategy users were shared.

To find possible differences in the process of strategy learning between the higher and the lower proficiency groups, the submitted entries of portfolios were analyzed by using the adapted KJ method, so that the differences in the efficacy of strategy instruction according to the learners' English proficiency level can be accounted for. The KJ method was originally developed by Jiro Kawakita, a Japanese anthropologist (Kawakita, 1977, 1986), and has been used worldwide in various fields such as quality control and personnel resources development (e.g., Dale, 1999). In this method, connected events and phenomena are categorized into separate groups through careful steps of reading and coding. In the present analysis, each entry was carefully read and re-read by the authors, and the coding system was developed. The descriptions in the entries were then coded, and grouped based on their similarities. In coding and grouping, approximately 10% of portfolios were randomly selected and checked by another researcher. Inter-rater agreement was 84.2%, which is considered to be satisfactorily high. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion. In this way, the differences, as well as the similarities, in the process of strategy learning between the two groups were identified. In the previous literature, portfolios have been utilized only as a training tool to provide learners with opportunities (a) to reflect on and assess their own learning (e.g., Antonek et al., 1997; Donato and McCormick, 1994), (b) to reinforce their strategic behavior (Janzen, 1996), and (c) to transfer its use to other tasks/skills (Janzen, 1996). In this study, however, portfolios were used as a data collection method in addition to a training tool.

Although the advantages and the disadvantages of portfolios used for research purposes have not yet been sufficiently discussed, they are said to be useful in revealing the process of learning or of using strategies (Donato and McCormick, 1994).

Table 1.
Differences between the higher and the lower proficiency groups

	Group	N	M	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Cloze test (out of 45)	Higher	5	23.6	0	$p < .00$
	Lower	5	9.6		
In-class quizzes (out of 10)	Higher	5	7.7	0	$p < .00$
	Lower	5	5.3		

Table 2.
Schedule and strategies taught

Week	Reading strategy taught
Week 1	Parsing sentences, by putting slashes (/), into sense units (to grasp the main components of each sentence easily)
Week 2	Guessing unfamiliar words from the context
Week 3	Identifying and skimming the topic sentence in each paragraph to understand the outline of a passage
Week 4	Using key words in the title and the questions attached to understand the outline of a passage
Week 5	Using visual aids to understand the outline of a passage
Week 6	Paying attention to discourse markers (e.g., however, while, then, first) to comprehend a passage more effectively
Week 7	Effectively summarizing each paragraph after reading
Week 8	Review of the strategies introduced from Weeks 1 to 7

3. Results and discussion

As a result of the qualitative analysis, six major differences were identified between the higher and the lower proficiency groups, as summarized in Table 3. First, the two groups were different in the amount of descriptions in each entry for the portfolio. The “amount of descriptions” refers here both to the number of strategies reported and to the amount of descriptions of one strategy use in one entry for portfolio. In other words, the students in the higher proficiency group tended to report on the use of more than one strategy in detail in every entry for the portfolio submitted (see, for an example, Appendix B). The students in the lower proficiency group, on the other hand, were inclined to report on the use of a single strategy with little detail in each entry (see, for a sample, Appendix C).

The second difference is in the understanding of the purpose and the merit of each strategy use. The students in the higher proficiency group tended to write descriptions similar in kind to the one shown in Excerpt 1, which implies that she had well understood the purpose and the merit of using the strategy “paying attention to discourse markers”:

Excerpt 1

[Week 6: describing how HA used the strategy “paying attention to discourse markers to comprehend a passage more effectively”]³

By paying attention to discourse markers, I was able to follow the logical order of the passage very easily. They were also useful for taking memos, which helped me a lot to understand the passage. [Participant HA]

Table 3.
 Major findings: differences between the two groups

Major finding	Higher proficiency group	Lower proficiency group
Amount of descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Report on more than one strategy use in one portfolio entry – Write a lot with details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Report on a single strategy use in one portfolio entry – Write only a little with few details
Understanding of purpose and merit of each strategy use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understand the purpose and the merit of each strategy use – Use strategies for the sake of reading a passage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not well understand the purpose and the merit of each strategy use – Read a passage for the sake of using the strategies taught
Understanding of conditions in which each strategy is used effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understand the condition in which a certain strategy can be used effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not well understand the condition in which a certain strategy can be used effectively
Understanding of combined use of strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consider combined use of more than one strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not use more than one strategy in an orchestrated way
Understanding of timing for evaluating efficacy of strategy use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do not evaluate efficacy based on one-time use of a strategy – Try again to use the same strategy even after an unsuccessful attempt to use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluate efficacy based on one-time use of a strategy – Continue using a small number of favorite strategies only
Understanding of method for evaluating efficacy of strategy use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluate the efficacy of strategy use by confirming the understanding attained through the use of the strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluate the efficacy of strategy use without confirming the understanding attained through the use of the strategy

Portfolios of the lower proficiency group, on the contrary, did not contain such descriptions. These students seem to have read passages rather for the sake of using strategies. For instance, one student in the lower proficiency group wrote the following statement (Excerpt 2). It implies that she actually did not use the underlined discourse markers to comprehend the outline or the structure of the passage:

Excerpt 2

[Week 8: describing how LD used the strategy “paying attention to discourse markers to comprehend a passage more effectively”]

I underlined the discourse markers in the passage anyway. I was worried if I underlined words that were not discourse markers. Anyhow, I read the passage on a sentence-by-sentence basis. I could read it effectively because there were no difficult words. [Participant LD]

The third difference found is the understanding of the conditions in which each strategy is effectively used. The descriptions in Excerpt 3, which was made by a participant in the higher proficiency group,

showed that she had understood the conditions in which a strategy (i.e., “using discourse markers effectively”) could be used efficiently:

Excerpt 3

[Week 6: describing how HC used the strategy “paying attention to discourse markers to comprehend a passage more effectively”]

If there are very few discourse markers in a passage, the strategy of using them is less helpful to comprehend its outline. In such a case, I realized, skimming topic sentences [another strategy] is a much more useful strategy. [Participant HC; brackets ours.]

In another example, one student in the higher proficiency group stated that she had found a condition for using a newly-learned strategy more effectively. Excerpt 4 shows that she realized she could not use the strategy “guessing an unknown word” unless she fully understood the context, i.e., the meanings of other words around the unknown word:

Excerpt 4

[Week 2: describing how HB used the strategy “guessing unfamiliar words from the contexts”]

I guessed that “shopping facilities” meant “shopping centers” from the expressions around this phrase. I could successfully guess the meaning this time, but that was not easy because there were several unfamiliar words around “shopping facilities.” Next time, I should try to use the same strategy again in reading an easier passage that has few unfamiliar words to me. [Participant HB]

The participants in the lower proficiency group, however, showed in their portfolio entries that they actually did not sufficiently understand the conditions of using the strategies taught. For instance, Excerpt 5 illustrates that a participant in the group tried to use the strategy “paying attention to discourse markers” in a passage that included few discourse markers:

Excerpt 5

[Week 6: describing how LB used the strategy “paying attention to discourse markers to comprehend a passage more effectively”]

In this passage, I only found a few discourse markers, most of which were “and,” but by paying attention to these markers in reading, I learned that they were very important to understand the passage. [Participant LB]

Excerpt 5 seem to show a clear contrast to Excerpt 3, in which a student in the higher proficiency group showed that she had realized the inefficiency of using discourse markers in a passage containing only a small number of them. The weaker understanding of the conditions for the strategy use by the lower proficiency group was found also in the descriptions concerning the strategy “utilizing topic sentences.” Learners in this group often skimmed topic sentences to understand the outline of a passage that was made up of only two paragraphs or to understand the outline of a newspaper article, neither of which are considered to be suitable for using this strategy.

The fourth difference is found in the degree of understanding of the combined use of strategies. Learners in the higher proficiency group showed in their portfolio entries, as shown in Excerpt 6, that they had effectively utilized more than one strategy in combination:

Excerpt 6

[Week 7: describing how HA used the strategies “skimming topic sentences” and “using key words” in combination to understand the outline of a passage]

Just after using “skimming topic sentences,” I used the strategy of “using key words.” Then, I managed to understand important information in the passage. So, I think the combined use of these two strategies was effective. [Participant HA]

The learners in the lower proficiency group did not report on such a combined use of strategies at all. It is true that they did report on the use of more than one strategy in one entry for the portfolio, but their way of using them did not seem to be well orchestrated.

For example, both Excerpts 7 and 8 came from the same entry of the portfolio by the same participant (LC) in the lower proficiency group, and she explained the same two strategies (i.e., “skimming topic sentences” and “using key words”) as those reported in Excerpt 6 by the student (HA) in the higher proficiency group. Nevertheless, no sign of utilizing these strategies in combination was implied in LC’s entry.

Excerpt 7

[Week 5: describing how LC used the strategy “skimming topic sentences to understand the outline”]

From the sentences that I thought were topic sentences, I understood the passage was something about comic books. I also learned that it said something about Japan and the U.S. [Participant LC]

Excerpt 8

[Week 5: later describing how the same participant used the strategy “using key words in the title to understand the outline” in the same entry]

I guessed the passage was on comic books, from the title [i.e., Manga from Atlanta] of the passage. [Participant LC; brackets ours.]

This difference observed between the higher and the lower proficiency groups corresponds to the previous research findings that successful language learners tended to employ strategies in an orchestrated way, while unsuccessful learners did not (Vandergrift, 2003; Vann and Abraham, 1990). These results therefore emphasize the necessity of explicitly teaching the combined use of strategies.

The second, third, and fourth differences mentioned above lead to the fifth difference, i.e., the timing for evaluating the efficacy of strategy use. Since learners in the higher proficiency group realized the purpose and the merit of utilizing strategies (the second difference), the conditions of employing them (the third difference), and the orchestrated way of using them (the fourth difference), they were unlikely to assess the efficacy of strategy use based only on one-time use. They rather try to use the same strategy again in a different context or in different combinations. In Excerpt 9, one participant in the higher proficiency group reported on their unsatisfactory use of the strategy “effectively summarizing each paragraph after reading.” She, nevertheless, did not conclude that the strategy itself was ineffective for her learning. She instead considered that the unsuccessful effort was due to her wrong way of using the strategy. She then made another attempt to employ the same strategy again in a different way, as shown in Excerpt 10.

Excerpt 9

[Week 7: describing how HD used the strategy “effectively summarizing each paragraph after reading”]

My summary looked much like translation, and it was too long. Next time, I should and will try to summarize the essence of the passage only. [Participant HD]

Excerpt 10

[Week 8: describing again in the final week how the same participant HD used the strategy “effectively summarizing each paragraph after reading”]

I learned in the previous week that summarizing by writing several sentences was not so effective. So, this time, I made a table for summary. This turned out to be a good idea. [Participant HD]

The students in the lower proficiency group, however, tended to assess the efficacy of strategies based on one-time use, as found in Excerpts 11 and 12:

Excerpt 11

[Week 6: describing how LE used the strategy “paying attention to discourse markers to comprehend a passage more effectively”]

I underlined [wrongly] “perhaps” and “more and more” as discourse markers, but I was not sure what kind of functions [such as cause or effect] they had as discourse markers. Deciding such functions for each marker rather confused me. So, this strategy is not useful to me, I guess. [Participant LE; brackets ours.]

Excerpt 12

[Week 7: describing how LD used the strategy “effectively summarizing each paragraph after reading a passage” from a novel]

Everything seems to be important to me. I could not summarize by underlining important words and phrases. I am afraid this strategy is not useful to me at all. [Participant LD]

These descriptions clearly illustrate that the participants assessed the efficacy of these strategies right after they had used them only once unsuccessfully. They did not consider that their way of employing them was not appropriate. In this connection, the students in the lower proficiency group also showed a tendency to cling to a small number of their favorite strategies, as is seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 13

[Week 4: describing how LD liked the strategy “parsing sentences into phrasal groups”]

I like using this strategy very much. By using it, I understood the meanings very easily. So, I love this strategy and like to keep on using it. [Participant LD]

Excerpt 14

[Week 8: describing how the same participant used the same strategy in the final week]

I really like using this strategy. What is more, I got used to using this strategy. So, nowadays, only by using this, I can read effectively. [Participant LD]

In the portfolios of the final week, which was allocated to an opportunity for reviewing all the strategies learned, the students in the lower proficiency group were inclined to report on only a single strategy or a small set of strategies that they could use comfortably, as seen in Excerpt 14. This tendency presents a clear contrast to the learners in the higher proficiency group, who tended to report on their repeated attempts to use strategies that they had failed to utilize before, as shown in Excerpts 9 and 10.

Finally, the higher and the lower proficiency groups differed also in the method of evaluating the efficacy of their strategy use. The students in the higher proficiency group were likely to confirm the degree of their understanding attained by the strategy use through, for instance, turning to the outside resources such as dictionaries. An example was found in Excerpt 15, where a participant used the strategy “guessing unfamiliar words.” In this example, the learner confirmed whether her strategy use was successful or not by using an English–Japanese dictionary, an outside resource.

Excerpt 15

[Week 2: describing how HC used the strategy “guessing an unfamiliar word from the context”]

I guessed the meaning of “buzz” from the context. It appeared twice in the passage. In the first sentence (“We buzz.”), I understood that “buzz” was a verb, since the sentence consisted of two words and the subject was “We.” In the second sentence of “Buzzzzzzf,” the same letter z was repeated. Then, I guessed the word “buzz” should mean a sound of something. Based on these analyses and the word “bee,” which appeared just before “We buzz,” I guessed “buzz” referred to “making continuous sounds by rubbing wings.” I confirmed that my guess was right by looking up the word in an English-Japanese dictionary after reading, and I was very glad. [Participant HC; parentheses in original.]

The learners in the lower proficiency group, on the contrary, tended to evaluate the efficacy of the same strategy without such confirmation, as illustrated in Excerpt 16:

Excerpt 16

[Week 2: describing how LA used the strategy “guessing an unfamiliar word from the context”]

I guessed the word “intensive” referred to “studying English in a particular way,” based on the previous word “attend,” and on the following clauses “before the fall semester starts.” I usually could not guess the meaning of unfamiliar words correctly before even though I tried hard. But this time, I came up with the meaning. [But no confirmation in a dictionary.] I was glad. [Participant LA; brackets ours.]

In this description, the participant successfully guessed the meaning, but no confirmation followed. In the case of the higher proficiency group, the learner checked her guess no matter how confident she had been with her inference, as shown in Excerpt 15. This is consistent with the findings reported by Hulstijn (1993), Knight (1994), and Takeuchi (2003). Thus, explicitly instructing students to confirm their comprehension after inferencing is highly recommended.

4. Conclusion and implications

Before concluding, two limitations of the present study should be mentioned. First, the number of the participants whose portfolios were analyzed in the present study was small. Verification of the findings in this study by using a larger sample, therefore, is necessary. Second, the participants in this study were all female. Previous studies report that gender is one of the variables affecting the use of

language learning strategies (Ehman and Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1993; among others). Some differences identified in this study thus might not necessarily apply to the male population. With these limitations in mind, the following conclusion can be drawn:

In the process of learning reading strategies, EFL learners with higher proficiency differ from those with lower proficiency. The first difference is the amount of description. The second, third, and fourth differences concern the understanding of the purpose and the merit of each strategy use, of the conditions in which each strategy is used effectively, and of the combined use of strategies. Also, the timing and the method for evaluating the efficacy of strategy use are different.

Based on the conclusion stated above, a pedagogical implication can be made. In strategy instruction, rather than giving abstract explanations, concrete examples of effective strategy use drawn from learners with higher proficiency could be presented to learners with lower proficiency. At the phase of introducing strategies, for instance, the conditions in which strategies can be used effectively and the combination in which more than one strategy can be used together could be presented by providing ample examples drawn from portfolios written by the higher proficiency group. At the phase of evaluating the usefulness of strategies, learners could be trained to check the degree of comprehension by using the methods observed in the higher proficiency group. Also, learners could be encouraged to apply the same strategies again in a different way to different situations, as was observed in the portfolios of the higher proficiency group.

The present study also provides two research agendas for future studies. First, the efficiency of the training method described in the pedagogical implication above should be validated. Second, portfolios as a data collection method should be examined critically. Through such critical appraisal, portfolios as a data collection method can be improved, and thus can reveal more the real process of strategy learning.

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Notes.

- 1 In-class review quizzes were made up of the questions related to the contents of the previous class.
- 2 Teacher's feedback is said to be crucial for learners to make meaningful descriptions on their own strategy use. Without such feedback, as Harris et al. (2001) claim, learners' descriptions of their strategy use would range from "It looks fun and interesting" to "I do not know."
- 3 Initials for the participants are pseudonyms.

**Appendix A. A sample of the handouts used in the strategy instruction
(Instructions originally written in Japanese; Translation ours.)**

[Review of the Last Lesson]

Tips for reading 5: Let's use visual aids to understand the outline of a passage!

Before reading the passage below, look at the picture beside it, and predict the key words of the passage. (List at least two key words below.)

Key Words = _____, _____

Every year more students apply for studying at Blake College, and there are several reasons for our popularity. First of all, our campus is beautiful. We have many trees, large fields of grass, and beautiful, well-kept buildings. In addition, the college has excellent facilities, such as a new sports center, computer labs, and a large library. Moreover, there are always a lot of social activities to choose from. For example, there are films, lectures, dances, and concerts to enjoy on weekends. However, the tuition is not so expensive at \$900 per semester. Above all, the major reason for the success of Blake College is our outstanding faculty. Classes are interesting and informative and our professors are always ready to give individual help.



[Today's Tip]

Tips for reading 6: Let's pay attention to discourse markers to comprehend a passage more effectively!

(1) **Purpose** Discourse markers are used to show the logical order of a passage. By paying attention to the markers used in the passage, you can follow the order and easily understand the outline of the passage.

(2) **Example**

They can deliver parcels to just about anywhere overnight. **In other words**, packages can be shipped the next day.

→ "In other words" means "If I say it differently." Therefore, the sentences before and after "in other words" basically state the same thing.

→ Also note the synonyms found in the first and the second sentences:

parcels = packages, deliver = ship, overnight = next day

(3) **Advice for Use** Frequently used discourse markers are

- (1) **addition**: and, moreover, also, _____, etc.,
- (2) **contrast**: but, however, although, _____, etc.,
- (3) **exemplification**: for example, _____, etc.,
- (4) **paraphrase**: in other words, namely, _____, etc.,
- (5) **chronological/logical order**: first, second, _____,

finally, before, etc.,

- (6) **cause/reason**: because, as, due to, etc., and
- (7) **effect/result/summary**: so, therefore, consequently, etc.

(3) **Practice**

Read the passage on the top of this handout by paying attention to discourse markers, and summarize the outline of the passage.

**Appendix B. A sample portfolio entry by a higher proficiency student (HB)
(Student's comments originally written in Japanese; Translation ours.)**

Appendix B. A Sample Portfolio by a Higher Proficiency Student (KK)

◆ 4 ◆

Puppies For Sale

A store owner was tacking a sign above his door that read "Puppies For Sale." Signs like that have a way of attracting small children, and sure enough, a little boy appeared under the store owner's sign. "How much are you going to sell the puppy for?" he asked.

The store owner replied, "Anywhere from \$30 to \$50." The little boy reached in his pocket and pulled out some change. "I have \$2.37," he said. "Can I please look at these?"

The store owner smiled and whistled and out of the kennel came Lady, who ran down the aisle of his store followed by five teeny, tiny balls of fur. One puppy was lagging considerably behind. Immediately the little boy singled out the lagging, limping puppy and said, "What's wrong with that little dog?"

The store owner explained that the veterinarian had examined the little puppy and had discovered it didn't have a hip socket. It would always limp. It would always be lame. The little boy became excited. "That is the little puppy that I want to buy."

The store owner said, "No, you don't want to buy that little dog. If you really want him, I'll just give him to you."

The little boy got quite upset. He looked straight into

Chicken Soup for the Soul, KINSEID. p.11

Strategy 3: Identify the topic sentences to understand the outline of the passage

I identified the topic sentence in each paragraph and read it.

I managed to grasp the outline of the passage, but the topic sentences were not clear enough to be identified and they included many unknown words. Therefore, this strategy was not so helpful to read this passage.

Strategy 2: Guess unfamiliar words from the context

I guessed the meaning of "tack" as "hang (on a door)", based on the surrounding words like "above his door", "signs", and "A store owner".

I guessed the words with confidence this time, but I checked the meaning later in a dictionary, which says "stick something with a pin". My guessing was not exactly correct, but it was good enough to understand the outline of the passage.

Strategy 4: Use key words in a title and attached questions to understand the outline of the passage

I decided "Puppies For Sale" and "little dog" in the title were key words, and read the sentences which included these key words.

I noticed these key words were often contained in topic sentences. I came to understand the main idea of the passage only by reading the sentences which included key words. Therefore, I think this strategy is useful.

Appendix C. A sample portfolio entry by a lower proficiency student (LB) (Student's comments originally written in Japanese; Translation ours.)

Appendix C. A Sample Portfolio by a Lower Proficiency Student (KN)

◆

The time came for the Junior Prom, and I didn't have a date. I didn't have anyone to go with, nor did I have anyone to talk to about it. I felt so bad that I told Doug about it. He said that he didn't have a date either, and that if neither of us found anyone to go with, we could always go to the prom together. And that's what happened. To our surprise, we had a pretty good time!



After the dance, we were invited to a couple of parties by a few people we knew. They made it obvious that they wanted me to bring Doug. I had never been very interested in sports, so I didn't know that Doug was now a star swimmer. People crowded around us, and Janet and Anne were among them. They joked with us at the party. We had never had so many people who wanted to talk to me before.

Strategy 5: Use key words to understand the outline of a passage (2)

I understood the story by looking at the picture in the middle. Using this picture in particular, I understood what the Junior Prom was.

Strategy 2: Guess unfamiliar words from context

I read the passage slowly because each sentence was long. I think I understood better by remembering the grammar of "nor + verb + S (subject)".

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